

News Clippings

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New name, same direction

Flood relief group in urgent need of case management volunteers for effort.

Scott Allen

Reporter

Another meeting by the local long-term disaster recovery committee determined that the group's biggest need is volunteer case managers.

During their meeting Wednesday, the group also decided in a unanimous vote that they should be dubbed "Disaster Assistance for Northwest Indiana," or DANI. This name will take the place of their temporary acronym, NWCLTR.

DANI is a group of government, community and faith-based organizations that plan to receive charitable donations and distribute them to flood victims with needs other than those that can be provided by government disaster relief and insurance. The group plans to operate over at least the next 18 months, evaluate the needs of victims via case management and help people based on their unmet needs.

The DANI group heard some statistics from Larry Belmont of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). "There's been just under 1,700 applications (for FEMA assistance) filed thus far," he said.

Over 1,300 needs inspections were completed, and about \$4.5 million has been approved for housing and other needs assistance from the agency throughout the 21-county federally designated disaster area.

Belmont pointed out that if a home was previously inaccessible to be inspected and is now accessible, the owner should call FEMA at 800-621-3362 and inform them of the new situation. He also pointed out that FEMA had grants available for needs other than home repair, but that no one would be eligible until a Small Business Administration Loan application had been submitted.

"Some needs unmet by FEMA can be met by SBA loans, that's why it's so important to turn that in," said Belmont.

The DANI committee also discussed bylaws, their budget and the acquisition of a fiscal agent before hearing from Ed and Helen Mulder. The Mulders informed the group that the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) could provide a team to come in and perform surveys to determine what flood victims' other needs were.

The committee learned that team members of the CRWRC could come in as soon as the end of March to go door-to-door and man walk-in centers, to discuss with flood victims what their unmet needs were, then submit a detailed database and reports regarding their findings. The reports would list the types of goods the victims still needed, and would be invaluable to case managers. The group expressed their interest in utilizing this service.

Rev. Mary Van Wijk, Remington United Methodist pastor and a co-chair of the group's case management committee, expressed the increasingly urgent need for case managers to serve their own afflicted areas. "We need people who can respond in their own communities," she said.

Though the case management process will require both paid and volunteer positions, the biggest need was for volunteers who can put in at least a few hours a week determining the needs of victims on a case-by-case basis. "We will train them, we will provide them with the tools and the skills," said Van Wijk.

Training has been scheduled for Friday and Saturday, March 7-8. The group urged that anyone interested in helping people in their community with just a small amount of time should plan to attend.

Volunteers were needed throughout the DANI disaster area, but most especially in Carroll, Jasper, and White counties. These volunteers only need to attend a two-day training session to be educated in case management, and gain skills that could be invaluable in the future, according to Van Wijk.

She also urged church leaders in the community to suggest to the group at least one volunteer, and join the spirit of the faith-based disaster recovery initiative.

"The need at this point is urgent," said Van Wijk. "We need committed case management and volunteers."

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